

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 0480

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PK
SUBJ: BHUTTO IN POWER: A FIFTH ANNIVERSARY ASSESSMENT

1. THE FOLLOWING IS A SUMMARY OF EMBASSY AIRGRAM A-09.

2. "BHUTTO'S FIFTH ANNIVERSARY IN POWER, PLAYED DOWN IN PAKISTAN, OFFERS AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXAMINE SOME MAJOR THEMES OF THESE YEARS. THE MOST SIGNIFICANT OF THEM HAVE BEEN THE PM'S OWN MASTERY OF THE PAK POLITICAL SCENE AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE COUNTRY'S INSTITUTIONS WHICH HAS ACCOMPANIED IT AND HELPED MAKE IT POSSIBLE.

3. BHUTTO'S POWER IS REMARKABLE, AND HE IS ABLE TO EXERT DECISIVE INFLUENCE OVER ASPECTS AND LEVELS OF PAK LIFE WHICH IN OTHER TIMES REMAINED AT MOST INDIRECTLY AFFECTED BY THE MAN ON TOP. HIS PERVASIVE INVOLVEMENT REFLECTS HIS INTENSELY PERSONAL APPROACH TO GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS. IN THE COURSE OF HIS FIVE YEARS OF INCREASINGLY UNQUESTIONED POWER THERE HAS EVOLVED A QUASI-IMPERIAL BHUTTO CAUGHT UP IN WHAT SOME IDENTIFY AS A CULT OF PERSONALITY. HIS STYLE HAS DOUBTLESS DISILLUSIONED
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SOME OF HIS EARLIER FOLLOWERS. ANY ASSESSMENT OF A LEADER'S POPULAR STANDING IN A COUNTRY LIKE PAKISTAN IS DIFFICULT: OURS WOULD BE THAT BHUTTO IS LESS POPULAR NOW THAN WHEN HE FIRST CAME INTO OFFICE, AND THAT THIS DECLINE HAS GENERALLY BEEN MORE PRONOUNCED IN THE CITIES THAN IN THE COUNTRYSIDE.

4. AT THIS TIME, THE PM FACES NO SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGE FROM ANY

SOURCE EITHER TO HIS AUTHORITY OR THE MANNER IN WHICH HE EXERCISES IT. HE IS MORE POLITICALLY ASTUTE THAN HIS RIVALS. THE FACT THAT THERE HAS BEEN NO ONE IN THEIR RANKS ABLE TO PROJECT HIMSELF AS A PLAUSIBLE NATIONAL ALTERNATIVE TO BHUTTO HAS ALSO BEEN AN IMPORTANT ADVANTAGE FOR THE PM.

5. LIKE OTHER POLITICIANS, BHUTTO USES CARROTS AND STICKS TO HOLD POWER; THE INCREASED INVOLVEMENT OF THE GOP IN DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF LIFE HAVE MADE MORE OF THESE AVAILABLE. MORE FAR-REACHING AND NOVEL HAVE BEEN BHUTTO'S EFFORTS TO TRANSFORM PAKISTAN'S INSTITUTIONS IN WAYS WHICH ENHANCE HIS POLITICAL POWER. MUCH OF WHAT BHUTTO HAS TRIED TO ACCOMPLISH IN REMODELING THESE INSTITUTIONS HAS BEEN CONSISTENT WITH HIS VISION OF A MORE SOCIALLY AND ECONOMICALLY JUST PAKISTAN. THE POWER OF POSSIBLE COMPETITORS IN THE CIVIL SERVICE, THE RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP, AND OTHER ELITES HAVE BEEN CURTAILED BY THESE REFORMS.

6. FOR ALL HIS PERSONAL FLAMBOYANCE AND THE FAR-REACHING CHANGES HE IS EFFECTING IN PAK LIFE, BHUTTO IS A CAUTIOUS POLITICIAN. HE HAS A GOOD SENSE OF TIMING AND SOUND POLITICAL JUDGEMENT. HIS FOREIGN POLICY ROLE HAS SIGNIFICANTLY ADDED TO THE SENSE OF INDISPENSABILITY WHICH HAS BEEN ONE OF HIS TRUMP CARDS. HE HAS CREATED NEW INSTITUTIONS AND NEW ELITES, BUT THEY SERVE TO BOLSTER THE PM'S POWER AND NONE HAS BEEN ALLOWED TO BECOME A RIVAL TO HIM. YET WHILE BHUTTO HAS CHANGED PAKISTAN'S INSTITUTION IN WAYS WHICH REDUCE THE POWER OF POTENTIAL RIVALS, THE STRUCTURE HE HAS BUILT IS ITSELF A FRAGILE ONE WHICH COULD ULTIMATELY PROVE A SOURCE

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OF WEAKNESS.

7. THE BHUTTO SYSTEM IS SO VERY DEPENDENT ON THE PM'S POWERFUL FIGURE AT THE CENTER, AND SO REFLECTS HIS PERSONAL STYLE, THAT IT IS UNLIKELY TO SURVIVE HIS DEPARTURE FROM THE POLITICAL SCENE IN ITS PRESENT FORM. THE CHANGES HE HAS EFFECTED -- PARTICULARLY THE POLITICIZATION AND "AWAMI-IZATION" (POPULARIZATION) OF IMPORTANT SEGMENTS OF PAKISTAN LIFE -- HAVE FUNDAMENTALLY TRANSFORMED THE POLITICAL EQUATION OF THE COUNTRY. WHAT FOLLOWS HIM IS LIKELY TO BE DIFFERENT, BUT IT WILL BE PROFOUNDLY AFFECTED BY WHAT HE HAS ACCOMPLISHED."

BYROADE

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